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Comment on the geographical variation of the Malachite Kingfisher *Corythornis cristatus* of the Afrotropics

by P. A. Clancey

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Over the past 30 years the geographical variation exhibited by the Malachite Kingfisher *Corythornis cristatus* (Pallas), 1764, has been discussed in varying degrees of depth by Rand *et al.* (1959), Clancey (1965, 1978) and more recently by Dickerman (1989). Following Rand *et al.* *C. c. galeritus* (Müller), 1776: Senegal, has been largely accepted and accorded an extensive continental range, the nominate race restricted to the southern aspects of Africa in association with the South West Arid Zone. In his recent re-assessment of the subspecific taxonomy of the species, Dickerman restricts usage of the name *galeritus* to the far western population distributed from Senegal, south to Liberia, the Ivory Coast, and, perhaps, Ghana, placing the birds occurring to the immediate east of it in the nominate subspecies, the type-locality of which is the Cape of Good Hope, Cape. As this new arrangement, arrived at on the series of specimens in the American Museum of Natural History, New York, is at complete variance with that in current use in Africa, as in the *SAOS Checklist* (Clancey 1980), I have re-examined the issue, confirming that nominate *C. cristatus* is indeed confined to Africa south of the Zambezi, its precise range being southern Namibia and Cape Province, east to Natal, the Transvaal and the plateau of Zimbabwe. It does not extend

north through the continent to the north of the Lower Guinea Forest. With the restriction of *C. c. galeritus* to the West African range now outlined for it by Dickerman and confirmation that *C. c. cristatus* is a Southern African Subregion form, it will be necessary to resuscitate the name *Alcedo cyanostigma* Rüppell, *Neue Wirbelth.*, Vög., 1837, p. 70, pl. 24, fig. 2: Abyssinia = L. Abiata, Ethiopia, for the populations of western and central Africa to the east of the "Dahomey Gap", east to the Sudan, Ethiopia and western Somalia, south to Angola and Zambia north of *C. c. longirostris* Roberts, 1932: Kabulabula, Chobe R., northern Botswana (= *robertsi* Peters 1945—for comment on the validity of which see Clancey 1978)—eastern lowland Zimbabwe, Mozambique and coastal Natal.

Prior to the adoption by the scientific community of Pallas's names proposed in Vroeg's *Catalogue Raisonné Coll. Oiseaux*, Adumbratiunculæ, No. 55, 1764, Rüppell's *A. cyanostigma* was accorded wide-usage for the African Malachite Kingfisher in the standard literature of the time. This being so, *cyanostigma* cannot be considered to be a forgotten name or *nomen oblitum*.

Currently, 3 races of the present kingfisher are generally admitted, namely, *C. c. cristatus*, *C. c. galeritus* and *C. c. longirostris* (= *robertsi*), to which must be added *C. c. cyanostigma* with a range as given above. As the names *C. c. cyanostigma* and *C. c. stuartkeithi* Dickerman 1989: Anseba R., northern Ethiopia, are both available for the Ethiopian representation, it will be necessary to determine if the latter is in fact separable. Limited material examined from critical localities in Ethiopia (including Eritrea) and Sudan does not indicate any regional divergence in ventral colouration which would justify further recognition of a localized arid country subspecies from northern Ethiopia and the Blue Nile drainage in general.

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